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Carol X Weakley 11/13/2006 04:09:44 PM From DB/Inbox: Carol X Weakley

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RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 2433  
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SIPDIS

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WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
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HQ USAF FOR XXXX  
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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[1](#)1. Prime Minster Olmert Visit to the US

[1](#)2. Mideast

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Key stories in the media:  
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All media reported that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert began his visit to Washington on Sunday. Israel Radio reported that PM Olmert had met Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and that the meeting was in preparation for Olmert's meeting with President George Bush. The media noted that the main topic of the Olmert-Bush meeting would be Iran and the Palestinian issue. Yediot reported that PM Olmert would urge President Bush to: "instill fear into Iran." On the Palestinian issue the media reported that Olmert intended to tell President Bush that he is prepared to approve the Palestinian Bader Brigade to enter Gaza from Jordan, provided that the troops come without their families and that the units be rotated once every three months. He is also prepared to approve a weapons transfer from Egypt and to release funds for humanitarian purposes.

All media cited Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini as saying, in response to several Israeli figures' statements that Israel may attack Iran, that Iran would put its Revolutionary Guards into action if Israel attacked the Islamic Republic: "If Israel takes such a stupid step and attacks, the answer of Iran and its Revolutionary Guard will be rapid, firm and destructive and it will be given in a few seconds."

Ha'aretz quoted Palestinian sources as saying that several key positions in the new cabinet of experts will be given to moderate figures that are acceptable to the US. According to the sources, the whole deal is subject to the US's willingness to lift the economic sanctions placed on the PA, and on Israel's readiness to release the imprisoned Hamas cabinet ministers as part of a comprehensive deal for the release of abducted Israel Defense Forces soldier Gilad Shalit. The paper also reported that Arab League countries have decided to lift economic sanctions on the PA. This move is in response to the U.S. veto on Saturday in the UN Security Council of a resolution sponsored by Qatar denouncing Israel for the IDF operation in Beit Hanun last week.

All media reported that the committee headed by Major General (reserves) Doron Almog that was set up to examine the IDF's functioning during the period leading up to Hezbollah's July 12 attack submitted its findings on Sunday, which were critical of the IDF at all levels. Brigadier General Gal Hirsch, commander of the Galilee Division (Division 91), submitted his resignation on Sunday after Almog had warned him a week ago that he would probably recommend his ouster. The media reported that Chief of Staff Dan Halutz rejected all criticisms aimed at officers above the level of divisional commander and demanded that Almog reexamine his findings on these issues. Yediot quoted senior IDF officers as saying that only the resignation of CoS Halutz can pull the IDF from the crisis it is in.

Maariv reported that four Palestinian organizations threatened that the US would become a target for terrorist attacks. The Palestinian threat came in the wake of the US veto at the UN Security Council against the proposed resolution to condemn Israel for the deaths of civilians in Beit Hanoun.

TV Channel 10 ran footage from the surveillance cameras that recorded Jonathan Pollard taking classified materiel out of the US

Navy Intelligence offices shortly before being arrested.

Maariv reported on negotiations between MK Atniel Shneler, PM Olmert's representative, and the Yesha Council regarding illegal outposts. According to the agreement under discussion, 15 outposts will be evacuated, four will be partially evacuated, and eight will be legalized.

All media cited Lebanese President Emil Lahoud as saying that once the Hizbullah ministers resigned from the government, the Lebanese government lost its legitimacy.

On Sunday, Yediot reported that the IDF Intelligence Branch has recommended that the political echelon examine positively signals that Syrian President Bashar Assad has been sending to Israel about his willingness to renew peace negotiations between the two states. According to the paper, neither PM Olmert nor Mossad Director Meir Dagan agreed with the IDF Intelligence assessment.

Yediot reported that the Palestinians are demanding that Israel return all documents it seized in its raid on the Orient House in East Jerusalem in 2001. According to the Palestinians, the documents contain historic collective memories of the Palestinian people.

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11. Prime Minster Olmert Visit to the US:  
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Summary:  
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Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in a page-one article in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "There is a price to pay for the political handcuffs restraining Bush and Olmert: Israel is growing closer to war with Iran and getting sucked deeper into the quicksands of Gaza."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "A realism worthy of the name would begin with this basic premise: The refusal to confront and punish aggressive tyrants will not result in their moderation but in the opposite -- more terrorism, greater threats, and a less free and more unstable world. We hope that Bush does not need Olmert to remind him of this, and that our prime minister's confidence is better placed than meets the eye."

Block Quotes:  
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1I. "A Meeting in Handcuffs"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in a page-one article in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (11/12): "In an ideal world, Ehud Olmert and George W. Bush would finish the weighty part of their meeting in five minutes and move on to talking about their families, their children and sports. Bush would promise to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities and thus remove the existential threat hanging over Israel, while Olmert would promise to withdraw from the territories, evacuate the settlers and create a Palestinian state, thus giving Bush the 'legacy' of a two-state solution.... The Democratic victory in the Congressional elections, which has been interpreted as Bush's punishment for getting stuck in Iraq, has reduced the chances that the U.S. will attack Iran and thus released Israel from the unbearably difficult decision of whether or not to attack Iran's nuclear installations itself.... Olmert, for his part, has recently promised territorial compromises and a mass release of Palestinian prisoners. These are empty promises, however, at least until the government in the Palestinian Authority is replaced.... There is a price to pay for the political handcuffs restraining Bush and Olmert: Israel is growing closer to war with Iran and getting sucked deeper into the quicksands of Gaza. The hope that the 'international community' would somehow restrain Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is dying. The pronouncements issued in Jerusalem and Tehran are growing more strident as both countries increase their military strength and seek diplomatic refuge in the UN Security Council.... Israel's 'low profile' policy in the face of the Iranian threat evaporated over the past several weeks as the world's impotence in dealing with Iran became more obvious.... That will be Olmert's primary message to Bush. Will a veiled threat be sufficient to rouse the U.S. into saving Israel and attacking Iran?

Will Olmert's promises to withdraw from the territories in exchange persuade the administration?"

## II. "Bush, Olmert and Iran"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (11/13): "Prime Minister Ehud Olmert arrives in Washington as a leader with the dubious distinction of having lost even more popularity over his management of a war than has George Bush. Unfortunately, Olmert and Bush may be the last leaders on earth who are at all serious when they say that an Iranian bomb must be prevented at all costs. In fact, it is not clear that Bush himself can still be placed in this category.... It is Bush who stated flatly that the US would 'not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons.' Yet at precisely the time when his secretary of state seems to have adopted the notion that the US must stay in lockstep with Europe ... rather than appointing someone who might countervail the current feckless approach, Bush nominated a Pentagon chief who can only be expected to reinforce a path of accommodation, not confrontation. A realism worthy of the name would begin with this basic premise: The refusal to confront and punish aggressive tyrants will not result in their moderation but in the opposite -- more terrorism, greater threats, and a less free and more unstable world. We hope that Bush does not need Olmert to remind him of this, and that our prime minister's confidence is better placed than meets the eye."

## 12. Mideast:

### Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "The situation in the Gaza Strip cries out for the world's help. After hundreds of Palestinians have been killed and hundreds of Qassam rockets have landed in Israel, and lacking any exchange between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, the two sides once again cannot extricate themselves from the miserable situation into which they have deteriorated. In light of the situation, the world is called on to intervene directly, as is the norm in other areas of conflict."

Palestinian affairs correspondent Danny Rubinstein wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "After all the failed military attempts to stop the launching of Qassam rockets, the time may have come for a political attempt, based on the rehabilitation of Gaza with the help of the new Palestinian government. The lever for its establishment will be the release of prisoners in a manner that takes Palestinian demands into account."

Columnist Menachem Ben wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "Olmert is starting to show signs of weakness in all that concerns our relationship with the Palestinian and Arab enemy who has yet to give up anything.... Because the more the enemy recognizes your desire and weakness ... [the more] it raises its demands and makes everything impossible."

### Block Quotes:

## 11. "International Force for Gaza"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (11/13): "The situation in the Gaza Strip cries out for the world's help. After hundreds of Palestinians have been killed and hundreds of Qassam rockets have landed in Israel, and lacking any exchange between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, the two sides once again cannot extricate themselves from the miserable situation into which they have deteriorated. In light of the situation, the world is called on to intervene directly, as is the norm in other areas of conflict."

There is no need here to detail the danger to peace in the region and indirectly to world peace, as a result of the deterioration in the Gaza Strip. Israel's actions harm innocent civilians, and images of the killing broadcast round the world intensify hatred of Israel: At the same time, Israel cannot reconcile itself with constant rocket fire on its towns. An international force deployed in Gaza, primarily in the areas that border Israel and Egypt, could calm the

situation. Both Israel and the Palestinians should be interested in this.... Israel must initiate the move and thus appear interested in calming the situation. The world, for its part, should volunteer for the mission. The prime minister, who has left for political talks in Washington, could bring this idea with him, which has never been tried between Israel and the Palestinians and, in doing so, advance a new reality."

## II. "Prisoners' Deal is the Next Step"

Palestinian affairs correspondent Danny Rubinstein wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (11/13): "Those who imposed the siege -- Israel and the United States, and most of the nations of the world, including Arab nations, can congratulate themselves on their success. The Hamas government is being forced to resign. Abu Mazen also contributed to this. Although he is not a leader like the late PA chair Yasser Arafat, whose death two years ago was commemorated in the territories this week, circumstances caused him to maneuver in a way that forced Hamas to give in.... Abu Mazen had no choice but to participate in the international boycott of his government. Will the Hamas concessions lead to the establishment of the new government and to a calming of the situation in Gaza? That's not a certainty. After Fatah and Hamas agreed on the two important issues -- a common political policy (based on the "prisoners' document") and a government of experts -- a third, no less serious, problem remains: the deal to release prisoners in exchange for kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. Without a solution on this issue, there is no new Palestinian government. In other words, there is no chance of removing the siege and of achieving calm.... After all the failed military attempts to stop the launching of Qassam rockets, the time may have come for a political attempt, based on the rehabilitation of Gaza with the help of the new Palestinian government. The lever for its establishment will be the release of prisoners in a manner that takes Palestinian demands into account."

## III. "Signs of Weakness"

Columnist Menachem Ben wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (11/13): "Olmert is starting to show signs of weakness in all that concerns our relationship with the Palestinian and Arab enemy who has yet to give up anything.... Because the more the enemy recognizes your desire and weakness ... [the more] it raises its demands and makes everything impossible.... Olmert's defensive reaction to Syrian peace offers is also worrying.... But most worrying is the crawling of the right of return into the [legitimate] Israeli [debate].... Instead of Israel sticking to its righteous [stand] against the Palestinian and Arab non-compliance, instead of it clarifying out loud that anyone who talks about the right of return actually blocks any possible peace with Israel, a new division is made between bad Arabs (who want to destroy Israel directly) and good Arabs who want to destroy us by using the right of return. Eventually, we could find ourselves signing some sort of agreement with the good Arabs on the right of return. Because now the main goal is peace; it doesn't matter that it will lead to the destruction of Israel later."

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